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Second Year Lessons of Phonetics - Second Semester

1. Sentence Stress

a. Word Stress vs. Sentence Stress

As we have seen before, word Stress is the study of stress in the successive syllables that make up one word. That is, the study of stress falling on words of two or more syllables taken in isolation. Here, stress falls on only one syllable of the word. Sentence Stress, however, is the study of the distribution of the breath force through a sentence as a whole. E.g.: 'Give the 'children a 'glass of 'water. Here, stress can fall on several words in a sentence.

b. Function Words vs. Content Words

As we have seen before, we have, on the one hand, function words which are words which help make a sentence grammatically correct. These words are: auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, determiners, pronouns, modals, possessive adjectives, etc.

Content words, on the other hand, are words which have full lexical meaning on their own. They are nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs, demonstratives, interrogatives, possessive pronouns and negative auxiliaries (contracted).

c. When to Stress Function Words

Usually, function words are unstressed. However, sometimes they receive stress. But this happens only at some given contexts like when they occur at the end of a sentence, (where did you get that from?), or when the speaker wants to emphasize on a given function word for the sake of clarity or correctness (I said I am **at** the amphitheater, not **in** the amphitheater!).

d. Why to Stress Content and Function Words Differently

In spoken English, content words are generally stressed. In the meanwhile, function words are generally unstressed. But why? Simply, it is because content words carry the great proportion of meaning in a sentence or an utterance. However, function words carry LESS meaning. Therefore, content words are stressed, but function words are not!

E.g.: **Give** the **children** a **glass** of **water**.

Because function words carry little or no meaning, their absence or misuse does, indeed, slightly hinder understanding, but the listener(s) would probably still get the main idea of what we are saying: **give children glass water**. If content words, however, were missing from our speech, listeners would find it next to impossible to understand what we are trying to communicate. E.g.: The a of.

NOTE

A useful way of better understanding the difference between lexical words (information carriers) and function words (grammatical items) is to consider what happens when someone writes the text of a telegram or a rapid note for someone else to read.

Imagine that you receive this telegram message:

SELL CAR GONE FRANCE

This sentence is not complete. It is not a "grammatically correct" sentence. However, you probably understand the overall meaning conveyed by the 4 words in capital letters. These 4 words communicated very well, i.e. *somebody wants you to **sell** his/her **car** because he/she has **gone** to **France***. We can add a few words:

SELL my CAR I've GONE to FRANCE

Task 1: Here are some headlines, which contain only **lexical items**. Expand the headlines into complete sentences by adding the missing function words

1. *MAN WOMAN KILLED CROSSING STREET*
2. *GOVERNMENT AGREES APPOINTMENT NEW AMBASSADOR*
3. *PEACE TALKS HELD MADRID PROVED FAILURE*
4. *SMOKING POISON SAY LUNG CANCER SPECIALISTS*

Task 2: Read the long message below. Write the message as a telegram. Which words can be left out? Which words do you need in order to keep the meaning? Write the shortest message possible.

Phone Message

The book that you ordered has arrived in the bookstore. Our address is 921 Main Street. The store is open from 10 to 6 every day except on Sunday. Your book will be kept for you at the customer service counter which is at the front of the store.

2. Emphatic Stress: Focus Words

a. From neutral to emphatic stress

In the previous section we stated that the basic rule for sentence stress, i.e. the stresses falling on the lexical words and the function words being left unstressed. But, as we mentioned earlier, this applies to **neutral/ unmarked utterances**, that is, **utterances** which are **not marked by emphasis or contrast**. In other words, the rule concerns '**neutral stress placement**'.

However, in normal spoken English the speaker may intentionally select any word-whether a lexical or function item-as **the most important point of information** he wants **to draw the listener's attention to**. In that case, he can **focus on any word**, even a word that would normally be only a function word, for example in order to **correct information**. Look at the following:

A: *they've been to Mon 'golia, 'haven't they?*

B: *'No, "THEY haven't, but "WE have*

Notice here that in B's response the personal pronouns *they* and *we* (which are function words, usually left unstressed) receive **emphatic/contrastive stress** because, in this context, the speaker wants to focus attention on the contrast between *they* and *we*, i.e. in order to correct the wrong information.

b. Examples of Emphatic Stress

Look at this sentence

I didn't say he stole the money.

This simple sentence can have many levels of **meaning** based on the word the speaker wants to put **emphasis** on (i.e. not as a neutral statement). As you can see in the following table, there are many different ways the sentence can be **interpreted/understood** by the hearer. The important point to remember is that the true meaning of a sentence '**marked**' by

emphasis/contrast is also expressed through the word that carries emphatic stress on it, whether it is a lexical or a function word. This depends on the speaker's intentions, the meaning he wants to convey and, more particularly, the part of the message he wishes to draw attention to (**focus word**).

In the table below the word that carries emphatic stress is shown with a double stress mark and is underlined, all the other lexical words that follow this **emphatic stress (TS)** having only a **secondary stress** (instead of a primary stress). On the right hand side, the **meaning** suggested by **the shifting of TS** and the use of **emphatic stress** on it is indicated

| SENTENCE WITH EMPHATIC STRESS | SUGGESTED MEANING |
|--|----------------------------------|
| "I didn't say he stole the money | Someone else must have said it |
| I " didn't say he stole the money | That's not true at all! |
| I didn't " say he stole the money | I only suggested the possibility |
| I didn't say " he stole the money | I think someone else took it |
| I didn't say he " stole the money | Maybe he just borrowed it. |
| I didn't say he stole " the money | But rather some other money |
| I didn't say he stole the " money | He may have taken some jewelry |

c. Exercises

Exercise 1: Here is a simple exercise to help you develop the "art" of using emphatic stress. Take this sentence: **I said she might consider a new haircut.**

Say the sentence aloud using emphatic stress on the word underlined. Once you've spoken the sentence a few times, match the sentence version to the meaning suggested on the left.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. I said she might consider a new haircut | a) <i>Not just a haircut</i> |
| 2. I said she might consider a new haircut | b) <i>It's just a possibility</i> |
| 3. I said she might consider a new haircut | c) <i>It was my idea</i> |
| 4. I said she might consider a new haircut | d) <i>Not something else</i> |
| 5. I said she might consider a new haircut | e) <i>Don't you understand me?</i> |
| 6. I said she might consider a new haircut | f) <i>Not another person</i> |
| 7. I said she might consider a new haircut | g) <i>She should think about it; it's a good idea</i> |
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3. Weak and Strong Forms of Function Words

In English, many words can be pronounced in two or more different ways according to whether they are accented or unaccented, i.e. stressed or unstressed. These words, which are called function words, have two forms: a strong and a weak form.

a. Determiners

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form(s) | Example |
|---------|-------|---|--------------|---|
| 1. A | /el/ | I didn't say the man, I said a man. | /ə/ | Read a book. |
| 2. An | /æn/ | Indefinite articles are a and an . | /ən/ | Eat an apple. |
| 3. The | /ði:/ | This is the site I told you about. | /ðl/ /ðə/ | Wait for the en d. Open the do or. |
| 4. Any | /enl/ | Any of her books would be great. | /ənl/ | Give me any book. |
| 5. Some | /sʌm/ | Only Some teachers are nice. | /səm/ | Have some more cookies. |
| 6. That | /ðæt/ | I'll take that shirt. | /ðæt/ | She said that she wants to leave. |

b. Conjunctions

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form(s) | Example |
|----------|-------|---|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 7. But | /bʌt/ | They believe I did it, but I did not. | /bət/ | It's nice but expensive. |
| 8. Or | /ɔ:r/ | Do you like this or that? | /ər/ | I'll just take one or two. |
| 9. And | /ænd/ | I didn't say "you or I", I said "you and I". | /ənd/, /nd/, /ən/ or /n/ | Hide and seek. Tom and Jerry. |
| 10. As | /æz/ | As I told, I am married. | /əz/ | He's as old as me. |
| 11. Than | /ðæn/ | Look up the word " than " in the dictionary. | /ðən/ | Better late than never. |

c. Personal Pronouns (Subject)

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form(s) | Example |
|----------|-------|--|--------------|---|
| 12. He | /hi:/ | He does not like it, but I do. | /hl/ | He says he's sorry. |
| 13. She | /ʃi:/ | She got married, but her sister didn't. | /ʃl/ | Is she coming too? |
| 14. We | /wi:/ | Did you say " he " or " we "? | /wl/ | We're going now. |
| 15. You | /ju:/ | You broke it! | /ju/ /jə/ | What do you think? I think you did it! |
| 16. They | /ðel/ | Yes, They came. | /ðe/ | They're doing it now. |

d. Personal Pronouns (Object)

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form | Example |
|----------|-------|---|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 17. Me | /mi:/ | Is there one for me ? | /ml/ | Show me the way. |
| 18. Him | /hɪm/ | I killed him , with laughter! | /ɪm/ | Tell him the truth. |
| 19. Her | /hɜ:/ | It was her phone which was lost, not mine. | /hər/, /hə/ or /ər/ | Take her out. |
| 20. His | /hlz/ | Do you know if this is his ? | /lz/ | Take his name. |
| 21. Us | /ʌs/ | If you don't want it, give it to us . | /əs/ | Give us some of that. |
| 22. Them | /ðem/ | Don't tell me you gave it to | /ðəm/ | We saw them today. |

| | | | | |
|----------|-------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| | | them! | | |
| 23. Your | /jɔ:/ | Is this your place? | /jər/ /jə/ | Take your time. You're late. |

e. Prepositions

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form | Example |
|----------|--------|---|---------------------|---|
| 24. At | /æt/ | What are you looking at , idiot? | /ət/ | He's at home. |
| 25. For | /fɔ:/ | What's that for ? | /fər/ /fə/ | Thanks for asking. This is for you . |
| 26. From | /frDm/ | Where did you get that from ? | /frəm/ | It's from dad. |
| 27. Of | /Dv/ | Which substance is it made of ? | /əv/ /əf/ /ə/ | Queen of I ndia. Prince of S cotland. The end of the world. |
| 28. To | /tu:/ | Does it go with " in " or " to "? | /tu/ /tə/ | It's time to eat ! I want to know . |

f. Auxiliaries and Modal Verbs

| Word | S.F. | Example | Weak Form | Example |
|-------------|---------|--|-----------------|---|
| 29. Be | /bi:/ | A serial killer, that's what I want to be! | /bɪ/ | You'll be late. |
| 30. Am | /æm/ | Of course, I am . | /əm/ | Why am I here? |
| 31. Are | /ɑ:/ | Are you being for real? | /ər/ | They're happy. |
| 32. Was | /wDz/ | They said she was drunk, but I can't believe she was . | /wəz/ | He was very kind. |
| 33. Were | /w3:/ | I am sure I've seen them here, but I can't remember where they were . | /wər/ /wə/ | The questions were easy . The papers were late. |
| 34. Have | /hæv/ | How many souls do you have ? | /həv/ /əv/ | I have something for you. They've gone. |
| 35. Has | /hæz/ | What a beautiful smile she has ! | /həz/ /əz/ | It has been a great day. It's been an awful play. |
| 36. Had | /hæd/ | She can't remember how many husbands she had . | /həd/ /əd/ | I had been out. They'd been there. |
| 37. Do | /du:/ | Yes, I do . | /du/ /də/ | How do you do? I'll do it. |
| 38. Does | /dʌz/ | I truly wish he does . | /dəz/ | What does he do? |
| 39. Can | /kæn/ | Do it if you can ! | /kən/ | He can wait. |
| 40. Could | /kud/ | Could you help me, please? | /kəd/ | They could do it. |
| 41. Shall | /ʃæl/ | Nowadays, " will " is used instead of " shall ". | /ʃəl/ | I shall never forget you. |
| 42. Should | /ʃud/ | Yes, of course you should . | /ʃəd/ | You should tell him. |
| 43. Must | /mʌst/ | You must all come tomorrow. | /məst/ /məs/ | You must be Johnny! You must end this now. |
| 44. Because | /bɪkDz/ | Just because I'm very kind doesn't mean I can't defend myself. | /bɪkəz/ | It's because I like him. |